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AFRL worker finds fitness in base-sponsored boot camp

by Brett Turner, Skywrighter Staff

WRIGHT PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — The mere mention of boot camp aerobics classes may send chills through some people. The thought of grunting and groaning through various exercises with little rest between sets can make even those who have actually been through actual military boot camps cringe.

Consider Bill Martin the opposite. He's sweated through around 200 boot camp sessions in two years — and he has the results to prove it.

The 61-year-old program manager for Air Force Research Laboratory appears years younger than his age and has reaped the physical benefits of the regular exercise.

Boot camp aerobics is designed to work major body parts through several exercises that may use weights or other things. A class may include a combination of push-ups, sit-ups, running, lunges and other exercises.

"I come because I really enjoy it," said Martin. "It's a good quality product."

Martin said he wasn't a huge fitness enthusiast previously. He did activities like skiing, but never anything as physically taxing as boot camp aerobics.

Previously, Martin's main exercise was step aerobics. When those classes slowed down or went away, he turned to something new.

Boot camp aerobics began in late 2000 at Dodge Gym, and Martin had heard of it. Soon after, he decided to try it himself, and quickly found how challenging it was.

Kirk Links, Wright-Patterson's fitness director and boot camp aerobics instructor, remembers Martin's first class. Based on first impressions, Links figured it would also be his last.

"He came up to me after the class and said 'You're a crazy man,' so I thought we'd never see him again," said Links. "He started coming back and never misses. He's developed a staying power that's tremendous. That's dedication."

The combination of working with weights, stepping and cardio



Bill Martin, a program manager for the Air Force Research Laboratory, uses hand weights during an exercise at a boot camp aerobics class at Area B's Wright Field Fitness Center. Martin has attended around 200 boot camp classes in two years, which is the most of any attendees since classes began according to base fitness director Kirk Links, who also teaches the class. Martin said he intends to keep going until he retires. (Air Force photo by Spencer P. Lane)

activity is what Martin said spurred him to continue. But he admits having doubts in the beginning.

"Those first few I wondered if I would make it," said Martin. "It's still tough, but it's a good kind of tough."

What gives boot camp an extra edge is it's organized. Martin said he needs that kind of motivation to push him, and the variety of the workouts is another plus.

"That's the good thing — no two classes are the same," Martin said. "We work different muscle groups. Some days it's cardio, others it's something else. It's a total workout."

Constant work has also given Martin a new perspective on his fitness goals. In the beginning, he just wanted to maintain his then current level of fitness.

"Once I got into the class, I realized it was geared to a higher level," he said. "That's helped me improve my fitness. I can enjoy it and it's a workout."

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Links said he is amazed at not just Martin's fitness aggression for his age, but for his gender as well. The majority of boot camp attendees are women.

There is normally just a six-second rest period between sets, and can sometimes affect the men more than the women. This doesn't seem to phase Martin, who has built up stamina through the classes.

"Almost nothing I can throw at him he can't do," said Links. "About 80 percent of the population who start exercising eventually stop. With his dedication, he won't stop."

Martin comes to boot camp classes three times a week, and said even he is surprised a little at how much he can take. He plans to continue the pace until he decides to retire.

"When I look at others my age, I can attribute my fitness to this class," he said. "I want to retire in the best physical shape I can."

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